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## SUICIDE.\*

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THE question of suicide has its moral and physical aspects, or rather its purely moral and its physio-moral points of view; i. e., the question of responsibility to "God who gave" and the suicide's friends who have claim upon his life and its valuable use to Him and to them and to the man himself who may be allowed to have some personal rights in the premises; the Creator's claim to the continuance of that life being always conceded to whatever extent the same may, by reason and Holy Writ be established, "for God gave and God taketh away," as appears in life's story from its beginnings in "the Garden," the destruction of the earthquake and pestilence, the lightning's wrath and ocean's storm. God oftentimes sets but little value on a single life, as the world's woe and death under operation of nature's laws approve.

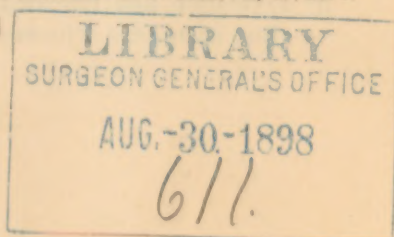
If we look from nature up to nature's God, we see that God and nature in their general providence deal with human life with unselfish and unsparing hand,

"So careful of the type she seems  
So careless of the single germ."

Individuals of genera and species in animal and vegetable life come and go, but the type of the animal and plant is maintained. Like the great rivers of earth whose waters are continually disappearing in the sea, they go on forever,

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at least, apparently, for rivers have dried up, though seldom, and seas have disappeared.

The strongest moral argument against self-destruction on the part of man, especially who has others dependent upon him in weakness of maintenance or strength of affection, is the golden rule, "For whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you do ye even so to them," and, conversely, it is the truth of truths of moral duty and conduct. And in this world of woe and weakness in human conduct where the wills of so many grow

"Weak and powerless as a trembling king  
When millions rise up hungry,"

who has not some other one dependent upon himself for affection and support or who has not around his "heart-strings" twining the tendrils of some other heart; it may be the unquenchable affection of a fond forgiving mother; may be a brother or "a nearer one and dearer than all other." Thus it is that "no man liveth to himself and no man dieth to himself," as the Scripture saith, and thus are man's social relations and consequent obligations such that, abstractly speaking, no well man has a right to take his life, because he has no moral right to violate the moral code of duty to his God, his fellows on himself. The welfare of his brother is upon him. He is in part his brother's keeper, notwithstanding Cain's disclaimer after his great crime. And if true to himself, he "cannot then be false" in duty "to any man."

A man cannot do as he pleases with his life more than he can with his money without peril to himself or others, unless he pleases to do the proper thing. In the social and moral world, the Scripture saith "we are members one of another," that is a man who is morally and physically healthy.

Besides, life is a gift from God and ought not to be under-valued or polluted or destroyed, that is when it comes to us pure and unpolluted. This is the general law taught by revelation and revealed "by sight of science" likewise.

But there are circumstances and times and places and



seasons when suicide is duty and devotion, a commendable courageousness and a god-like heroism, a blessing and a rescue to thousands, a filling of the law of love that what you would that others do for you, that you should do for them.

There are times and places and circumstances when the *argumentum ad hominem* and the voice of God approve of *felo-de-se*. That is, if we may reason from man's nature (physiological and pathological) as we reason from the physiological inanimate nature up to nature's God and man's duty under God.

In the Book of books, it is written that Judas, after the betrayal, went out and hanged himself, and so he ought, and no word of condemnation of that proper and timely suicide of that greatest of ingrates is recorded in the Bible.

The specious plea that as the gift of life came unbidden, it may be destroyed at the pleasure of the involuntary recipient, loses some of its force in the fact that it is generally voluntarily accepted as a precious gift after the age of discretion, and obligations to live are incurred by ties voluntarily formed and duties voluntarily assumed. This argument is again offset somewhat by the fact that man's volitions are much the result of environment, education and the predestinations of hereditary entailment.

And herein lies the proof that every man who lives is not bound in honor or in morals to live till natural law kills him despite every adverse environment, every affliction, every inherent vicious endowment, every entailment that insures misery to possible descendants and unhappiness to all allied to him.

On the contrary there exist those in whom suicide would show the highest of virtue in themselves and prove the greatest of blessings to mankind. To suicides the world owes much of its moral, physical and mental advancement. The records of history are not wanting in the proofs. The suicides have done as much good as the martyrs.\* The lat-

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\*What a blessing would Nero, Caligula or Napoleon have conferred upon the world by self destruction early in their careers?

ter by their example stimulating to heroic endeavor and sealing the truths of conviction, the former by ridding mankind of its weaklings and of breeds of weak and unworthy progeny that might have sprung from their loins unfit to live and do manful combat in the battle of life, ridding the world of a race of mental and moral weaklings and cripples, doing by their own hands what Lycurgus did for the Spartans. It is cowardly for one to destroy himself because the battle of life goes against him; it is profaning the temple to destroy it because peace and joy does not always reign within it, but when the consciousness exists, founded on indubitable proof, that to live on is to be doomed and to doom generations after to the misery of a weak and unstable and wrongly endowed nervous organism, suicide has in it elements of virtue. A world of woe has often been averted by timely suicides. Suicide is the pruning knife of civilization. It cuts out the weak and the miserable from the social tree and destroys neuropathic and psychopathic vines that would but cumber the earth with more sin and folly and crime than it now has to endure.

Not all men who commit suicide ought and more ought to that do not, for the good of the race.

A selfish man, living as though all the world was made for his sport or gust, giving free course to every impulse of lust and passion, bringing the natural satiety, disgust, disappointment and disease on himself of unregulated indulgence, who destroys himself, because he has made himself miserable and unfit to live, is a benefactor to his race in taking sudden leave of the world and the world should "speed the parting guest." The act, though selfish and thus unmanly, is also unintentionally philanthropic to his race, because he thus insures the cutting short of his kind, so far as he is concerned in the community.

If the breeding of the unfit to live could be stopped by more frequent suicides of the morally and physically unstably and viciously endowed—the neuropathic cripples, the mentally squint-brained and obliquely visioned, the lame and halt and blind in mind and morals, the cataract-covered consciences—the millenium of earthly happiness would begin.



As it is and has been, the suicides, though they have given much sorrow in special instances, they have as a rule, done the world far more good than harm by taking themselves away, their departure averting the compounding of the world's misery through the multiplication of such miserable beings, unable, unfit or unwilling to lift and carry their share of life's burdens or do a proper and manly or womanly part in the world's work and duty.

Though to the well endowed,

"Duty requires we calmly wait the summons,

"Nor dare to stir till Heaven shall give permission,

"Like sentries that must keep their stand,

"And wait th' appointed hour till they're relieved."

and though

"Those only are the brave who keep their ground,

"And keep it to the last;"

and though against self-slaughter "there is a prohibition Divine," it is against the well and the strong, the rightly dowered of brain and nerve. It holds not against weak, unstable organisms whose mental reactions to environment give pain and despair where others feel pleasure and hope or courage so mingled with mental pain that adversity gives to life's battle a zest as to warrior on battalioned field.

To the theologian, suicide is always sin; to the philosopher, it may appear as cowardice, crime, selfishness or virtue. To the physician, it may appear as to the divine and the philosopher. But to him, it may also appear as a virtue and a benefaction to mankind, according to the causes which may impel to it or suggest it, and the conditions which surround it and the consequences averted by it.

Suicide to the psychological scientist has its *odi et amo* aspects, as well as its phases of indifference. The time and the place, the man and the circumstance, anti-natal or posthumous conditions giving significance to the subject.

He sympathizes with the

"One more unfortunate,

"Weary of breath,

"Rashly importunate,

"Gone to her death,"

and asks not only the same questions as Hood, but many

others. Among them, whether she might have borne a race of mentally unstable, incapable of contending successfully in life's unequal struggle and adding to the misery of unborn generations a crop of suicides, imbeciles, demented or otherwise mentally maimed.

He knows she must have had a mother and likely a brother, and doubtless "a nearer and yet dearer one far than all other," for most maidens of her age, "so young and so fair," have felt reciprocal and reciprocated tender passion, and he looks with compassion on her sin, knowing that now not only "all that is left of her is pure womanly," but that she was probably "more sinned against than sinning" and that much that preceded her rash act was both humanly and womanly.

To the student of psychiatry, physiology and psychology "to be or not to be" is not all the question of suicide, and the soliloquy of Hamlet falls far short of answering it.

"Whether it is nobler in the mind  
 "To suffer the slings and arrows  
 "Of outrageous fortune,  
 "Or to take up arms against  
 "A sea of troubles  
 "And by opposing end them,"

is the egotist's view of the subject, and that egotism may and often is morbid in the self-murderer, who considers not his value to the world or the world's need of him and the effect and value of his life to others, but solely the world upon himself, as "a sea of troubles" to be ended by his own suicidal hand. Hamlet's whole soliloquy is ignoble and selfish. He showed the morbid egoism of the insane, as well as some simulation in his conduct. To take up arms against a sea of troubles and by manfully opposing, end them with face unfalteringly to the foe and without retreat in suicide, is noble, brave and manly. But to so oppose them as to die by one's own hand, "to sleep, perchance to dream" and to pause at the contemplation of "what dreams may come" in that self-induced death, is the ratiocination and indecision of agnosticism without settled convictions of the hereafter.



The fear of bearing "fardels" and of "the proud man's contumely" and the rebuffs "that patient merit of the unworthy takes," is not justification of suicide, except in the mind of the overwrought insane.

The real extenuation of suicide when it is excusable in the sane, is in the fear and proof of consequences to others than ourselves of living. The hereditarily dowered with a deadly heritage of transmissible brain instability, incurable disease and mental and physical woe, may entertain the idea of suicide with a view of its practical application. No man has a moral right to live and breed a generation of lepers and moral vipers. No man has a right to so live as to people poor-houses and penal institutions with crime and famine-cursed defectives. No man has a right to so live as to give to the state a heritage of lunacy, imbecility, deaf mutism or blindness, and to such as can not otherwise than so live, it were a virtue to die.

That law which seeks to prevent suicide without discrimination and encourages the conception of the unfit, as some of the short-sighted regulations of Mr. Anthony Comstock moulded into law, do, is not always in the right line of conserving the welfare of man.

There are circumstances and occasions, times, places and individuals, of which, where, when and of whom it may be said;

"What Cato did,  
"And Addison approved,  
"Can not be wrong."

Yet I do not approve of Cato's *felo de se*; Cato took his own life under the chagrin of Cæsar's triumph. Cato's nerve tone had failed. His trials and disappointments had broken him. Prostrated by over brain strain he had become cerebrasthenic. In our day he would have been advised to take treatment for neurasthenia and instead of being applauded he would be pitied for his weakness. Cato was out of harmony with his surroundings. He was not his normal, courageous self, doing and daring the worst as it was his nature to do, in his healthy mental estate. His

great brain gave way under the great strain of his unexpected reverse of fortune, the weight of his trials, the oppression, chagrin and mortification of defeat. He misinterpreted her misfortune in an abnormally melancholy light, and in a morbidly despairing moment, he blotted out a life which he insanely thought was no longer worth living. But when he did the deed, it was not Cato's hand, but disease that did it.